Social Justice in Education

Educational Goals

My proposed concentration is "Social Justice in Education". As a future teacher it is my duty to prepare myself with knowledge of identity groups to accommodate the needs of my students. No matter what backgrounds my students may come from, I want to focus my studies on providing my students with what they deserve.

Every child deserves the opportunity to succeed. For many public school systems, problems rooted in academic success are related to government funding, social environment, gang violence, and a lack of safe learning environments. The greatest issue, however, is taking on students all backgrounds. This is why I am taking classes in the School of Education, Social Thought and Political Economy (STPEC), and Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies (WGSS). I want to learn how to effectively teach, based on understanding of the social and economic factors in our school system, and to provide a safe environment or students of all identities, such as sex and gender.

Experiential Background

For the past five years, it has been a passion of mine to work in the education field. During high school, I got my first job in an after school program. I immediately fell in love with developing a positive influence for students to experience. Since then, I have been working in schools for about five years now through after school programs and summer camps. The students I have worked with were provided with clubs for drama, recreational activities in sports, and the space to socialize and develop human connections. I am still a part of this program, working seasonally as well as in the
summer camp available in my hometown.

Once I got to college I sought the opportunity to continue my work with students. I applied to be an America Reads tutor during my second semester and have been working at the same elementary school for three years now. I specialize in reading books with children, as well as promoting literacy amongst children of all backgrounds.

As a student at UMass, I have been a part of two theatre groups. The first is called Shaha and the other is Phallacies. Throughout grade school and high school I lacked the agency to freely practice the arts. It wasn't until my instructor encouraged me to audition that I discovered this form of expression. It is the understanding of one self and the world around us that has provided me with confidence and a new ability to speak publicly and teach others.

I also have experience as an RA and a peer mentor for CMASS on campus. I have worked with college students, mainly freshman by proving them with the knowledge I wish I knew as an incoming student. Not only that I made the commitment to provide a positive role model. As a mentor I have had dialogues with students on issues that all full time students face. There were at times tensions amongst neighbors in the dorms that were tough, but I always made sure to challenge these students to learn how to live amongst each other. At other times they faced the challenges of finding their inner-self. They were confused at where they stood in this society and at many times they just needed someone to talk to. These students were all adults but it was vital for them to have a person to look up to, on ways balance academics, part time jobs, and social life. What I kept consistent as a student leader was the opportunity for dialogue to solve these challenges.
Continuing Aims

I want to go straight into teaching upon graduation as an elementary teacher. My goal right now is to apply to the Collaborative Teacher Education Pathway (CTEP) program offered here at UMASS so that I can receive a Master's in Education in one year. Not only that I will be able to learn how to teach under an experienced educator. As a teacher I would set a positive foundation in which I will institute a progressive manner of teaching, a manner in which I will embrace the potential of all of my students. If I do feel as if I can do more outside of the classroom I would apply to be a guidance counselor in a high school setting. After years of being a teacher and or a guidance counselor, I wish to make institutional reforms in education in administration to provide my students the education they deserve.

Exceptions

200-Level Classes:

*Education 291 S- Theatre for Social Change*

This was a class I took in order to perform for a social justice theatre troupe on campus called Shaha. Shaha is a Swahili term that roughly translates to "the storytellers". Throughout the semester we performed once a week traveling dorm to dorm presenting a show that covered all issues in social justice. From heterosexism, to religious oppression we did pieces on every single "ism" we could. After each show, we facilitated a dialogue in which we engaged feedback and discussion with the active audience.
Women Studies 201- Gender and Difference: Critical Analyses

This class covers the globalization of oppression across the globe. It involves learning about all forms of oppression such as; sexism, classism, racism, and heterosexism. We critically look at how historically cultures have distributed power through laws and institutions. This was the first class I took at UMass that looked at this issue from a global perspective.

Retroactive Semester:

Education 4971 - Tutoring at Schools

I took "Tutoring at Schools" last semester where I learned a specific topic each week that has to do with education. One week we examined the different types of schools, how schools are funded, and the importance of diversity in the class room. I was also required to do forty hours of community service by the end of the semester. Education H4971 Honors Colloq Education 497

This was a one credit optional class that can only be taken while attending Education 497. This changed the required number of hours of volunteering at a school from forty hours to seventy five.

Sponsor

The sponsor I have chosen is Sharon Edwards. Sharon is an instructor for the School of Education. I took a class that she taught, Education 497 "Tutoring at Schools" last semester. I want to base my teachings with social justice, and what Sharon did with her teaching methods was just that. She recognized all of her students and their identities and addressed each student individually, as a whole through language for example. Instead of addressing the classroom as "boys", she would instead say "boys and girls" or
"everyone" to maintain an inclusive environment. Getting to work with a person who has been a teacher in an elementary school and being able to learn the history of the school systems she's worked with will set me on the right track to implement change in the education system. Sharon Edwards has a passion for teaching and she pushed me throughout last semester to take the initiative and seek the need to make a difference, and she has been adamant on pushing me to become an educator.